

“PERIPHERY CULTURES”, 20 YEARS LATER:  
INTERVIEW WITH ELEILSON LEITE<sup>1</sup>

“CULTURAS DE PERIFERIA”, 20 ANOS DEPOIS:  
ENTREVISTA COM ELEILSON LEITE

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Livia De TOMMASI\*

## Interview Context

The interview was conducted online on January 3, 2025, by Livia De Tommasi.

## Interviewee Introduction

A historian, bookseller, cultural agitator, and coordinator of the culture area at Ação Educativa, Eleilson Leite holds a master’s degree in Cultural Studies from EACH/USP with a dissertation on literary production in the outskirts of São Paulo (Leite, 2014). His personal and professional trajectory intertwines with that of the so-called “peripheral cultural movements,” which, in recent decades, have gained visibility and legitimacy in the city. This cultural effervescence has had a significant impact on the artistic field and cultural production, drawing the attention of both the cultural industry and academic research (Nascimento, 2006; Aderaldo, 2013; D’Andrea, 2013; Tommasi, 2013 and 2018; Tennina, 2017; Campos, 2019; Santos, 2019; Santos, 2024, among others). Eleilson was one of the first to write about the subject, using the phrase “the periphery is back!” to underscore the political nature

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<sup>1</sup> Transcribed by the interviewer.

of this protagonism in the cultural scene. His enthusiasm and willingness to speak and write about the topic, to organize events, to produce and promote initiatives, as well as to encourage (and sometimes accompany) engagement, were key motivators for my interest in closely observing what was taking place. More than twenty years after the publication of the first issue of *Revista Caros Amigos* titled “Marginal Literature: the culture of the periphery” and the creation of the *Sarau da Cooperifa* – two important milestones in affirming peripheral cultural production – I invited Eleilson to reflect on the political, cultural, and aesthetic significance of “peripheral cultures,” their conditions of possibility, and their limitations. With a more pragmatic, perhaps more disenchanted perspective, Eleilson shared his insights on the great heterogeneity of peripheral territories, on an artistic and cultural activism that is now more established – though not without limits and contradictions – and, above all, on his deep belief in the role of public policy.

**Livia:** *Tell us a bit about yourself and how your personal journey connects with the visibility gained by the cultural activities happening in the outskirts of São Paulo.*

The theme of the periphery is very familiar to me. I was born in Ceará into a large family with thirteen siblings. Some of the older ones migrated to São Paulo in the 1960s, and I came here with my parents and the younger siblings in 1972. We settled in the outskirts of the northern zone of the city, where, quite literally, everything was still bushland – in a neighborhood called Jardim Tremembé, at the top of a hill near Vila Albertina. At that time, the periphery still had rural characteristics, and my family managed to buy a plot of land in an area with many vacant lots (including some owned by Santa Casa), which later led, in the 1980s, to a wave of land occupations. I was part of the church youth group that built the first shack in Jardim Filhos da Terra in April 1984, when I was 16. That was the beginning of my engagement. Back then, however, the term “periphery” wasn’t commonly used – no one would say “we are from the periphery” as a mark of identity and belonging.

I left the area in 1988 when I started at USP, and, due to financial constraints and the distance, I got a spot in student housing. I had initially enrolled at a private college – *Faculdades Associadas do Ipiranga* – which trained seminarians, but my girlfriend encouraged me to apply to USP. I took a six-month prep course, studied hard, and was admitted to the history program. I remember that before I got into student housing, for about 2–3 months, I would take buses and walk long distances to get to college, arriving home at 1:00 a.m. and waking up at 6:00 a.m. to go to work. It was a tough time, as my parents had returned to Ceará in 1987 with one of my younger brothers, and the older ones were already married – so I was pretty much on my own.

At that time, I was working at the National Secretariat of the Landless Workers’ Movement (MST) as a general assistant, handling photocopying and newspaper distribution, preparing packages to be sent throughout Brazil. The MST operated out of the headquarters of the Instituto Sedes Sapientiae, affiliated with PUC, which also hosted several NGOs, such as the União das Nações Indígenas (co-founded by Ailton Krenak) and Centro de Educação Popular (CEPIS). I had already worked for five years at a notary’s office, and as an activist, I found my place within the environment of the MST. Entering university, living at CRUSP, and working at the MST were all key milestones that marked a turning point in my life.

Even before that period, I was very connected to cultural matters. At the age of 14 or 15, I would cross the city to attend shows at the *Espaço Lira Paulistana*, and I frequently visited Funarte and SESC Pompeia.

The MST was founded on a tripod of principles: discipline, organization, and ideological firmness. It was a highly organized group, with a clearly defined hierarchical structure, and it openly positioned itself as an arm of the Workers’ Party (PT) to build a worker-peasant alliance. The organization also placed strong emphasis on political education: once a week, we would gather to read and discuss a text. All of this deeply influenced my formation. People began to notice my potential, and when they created an “agitprop” (agitation and propaganda) sector – very much in the Leninist sense – I was invited to lead it. So, at age 20, I coordinated the process of defining the MST’s anthem and flag. João Pedro Stédile (one of the MST’s founders) had a lot of faith in me, and as a result, I began taking on new roles within the organization. Later, I was appointed editor of the movement’s newspaper – I was 21 years old and wasn’t even studying journalism at the time, but I had always liked journalism, and that experience later inspired the creation of the *Cultural Agenda of the Periphery*. In fact, the cover of the Agenda is almost identical to the cover of the *Sem Terra* newspaper. I’ve always liked writing, even back in my time with the Youth Pastoral, where I helped write the newsletters.

In the 1990s, I worked at the former CEDI (Ecumenical Center for Documentation and Information), where I coordinated the distribution of publications, which were numerous at the time. For instance, in partnership with other major NGOs like FASE and IBASE, we brought our materials to the São Paulo International Book Biennial in 1992. When CEDI closed in 1994, I decided to become a bookseller. I didn’t have a physical store, so I sold books at academic events and ended up making a lot of connections in that environment. I worked with that for three years, but the operational costs were too high, which led me to bankruptcy – I had to sell everything and still ended up in debt. Many times, just to be able to eat, I would sell books at national PT meetings or at bank workers’ union assemblies. That was my entrepreneurial period. This entrepreneurship thing enchants a lot of people, right? It’s a siren song, but I like the idea. Sometimes I

come up with potential business ideas and think: this could really work. I think it's in my blood – something I inherited from my mother, who sold clothes. Later, I went to work at CEPAM (Center for Studies and Research in Municipal Administration), an agency under the State Government's Planning Secretariat, located on the USP campus, where I stayed for three years.

In the year 2000, *Ação Educativa* – one of the organizations that emerged from the former CEDI – acquired a building on Rua General Jardim and committed to its funders to create a public-facing space, a youth and education center. Sérgio Haddad (coordinator at *Ação Educativa*) thought I was the ideal person to make that connection. At that point, there was still no talk of “culture” per se, but the youth area was already engaged with youth groups, most of which were related to culture and came from the periphery, like the hip-hop posses. When these groups saw the space, they immediately proposed that we host a hip-hop event.

To give you an idea, when I organized the opening celebration of the space on November 14, 2000, I invited a *chorinho* group to perform – which shows how unfamiliar I still was with peripheral cultures. But we reserved a room on the first floor for youth groups, and that's where I met Kal do Vale, from a posse called *Conceito de Rua*, a highly connected figure in the hip-hop scene who, like others (perhaps the most prominent being Sérgio Vaz), had the ability to build partnerships outside the periphery. He came up with the idea of organizing Hip-Hop Week, and Bruna Mantese, a youth area technician, brought the groups together for a meeting. It was difficult for people to come to the city center; they often didn't have money for transportation. The periphery has changed a lot in the past 25 years. So we would help out with some funds, and they would come – even though, for some, there were other obstacles, like curfews, which were common at the time. I really appreciated the collective construction of the event – sometimes 20–25 people would show up to organize together – and I went looking for partners: the nearby SESC, a print shop supported by the former Banespa employees' association, and the *Fundação Escola de Sociologia e Política*.

The Hip-Hop Week – with artistic performances, debates, and workshops – was an event that lasted for ten years. Some artists who are now widely recognized, like Rincon *Sapiência* and *Criolo*, participated in it. From 2001 to 2005, the event was very strong; later, it started to decline. However, it inspired the municipal law that created the official Hip-Hop Week in the City of São Paulo, through a bill authored by Councilwoman Claudete Alves, from the Workers' Party (PT). Similarly, we brought together groups for the “Graffiti Day,” when they would paint murals on the *Ação Educativa* building – and that also became municipal law: Graffiti Day. That's when I developed a taste for this kind of work – I learned how to bring everyone together and build events collectively. And I started to understand the power of peripheral culture, a cultural energy that I hadn't experienced in my own

time growing up on the outskirts. I believe hip hop played a central role – it inspired literature and influenced a lot of people. Even today, there’s a radio show on Rádio Heliópolis called *A Revolução Rap*, which has been around for, I don’t know, maybe 25 years, and it airs on *Rádio Brasil Atual* every Thursday, so people outside the Heliópolis area can listen as well. That kind of rap, the non-mainstream one, still has vitality. Nowadays, there’s a movement to bring back the idea of the *posses*, which were great: *Conceito de Rua*, *Aliança Negra*, *SUAT* (Sindicato Urbano de Atitude) – all highly engaged groups.

I was lucky to come into contact with hip hop – it taught me a lot. I got along well with the groups, and people respected me, partly because of my background. Even though I never spoke the slang of the periphery, I conveyed a certain sense of trust – something tied to identity. I’m from the same generation as many of the more mature artists, and to this day, I’m friends with many of them, including those who went on to become successful.

Then I began to realize there was this cultural effervescence happening. I started noticing other segments. I connected with the samba community, discovered *Samba da Vela* in 2004, and saw many other samba circles emerge. It became clear to me that the movement was diverse. I met Sérgio Vaz in 2003 during one of the debates at Hip-Hop Week, just as he was relocating the *Sarau da Cooperifa* from Taboão da Serra to Zé Batidão’s bar, where it still operates today. I believe these are two very important milestones that emerged almost simultaneously and demonstrate diversity. That’s when I started internally advocating for the need to create a dedicated cultural program area.

To structure a program or department at *Ação Educativa*, it was necessary to develop projects, have political influence, and produce knowledge – systematize it – and we were doing all of that. So, in 2006, I was able to convince the assembly that creating a culture area was feasible. One of the first initiatives we launched as a department was the *Cultural Agenda of the Periphery*. At first, I thought of conducting a mapping exercise to see how many initiatives existed. But one of Professor Magnani’s graduate students challenged me: “Another mapping?” So, I decided to create a guide, because I once picked up the *Folha de S. Paulo* events guide and noticed that it didn’t mention anything happening outside the central region of the city – everything was highly concentrated. The *Agenda da Periferia* started circulating in May 2007, which was a very important year for peripheral culture. It marked the tenth anniversary of Racionais MC’s album *Sobrevivendo no Inferno*, and on the cover of the first issue of the agenda, we featured a photo of the *Samba da Laje* circle in Vila Santa Catarina, which still exists today. It was a beautiful photo by Samuel Iavelberg, a photographer who, like others, came to us with a proposal and got involved.

At the time, we often said that peripheral culture helped to strengthen the social fabric of communities – that is, it played a unifying role and reinforced

ideas of identity and belonging. Raymond Williams talks about ideas that involve collectivity, and that's what the idea of belonging was about.

The agenda had 117 editions, with 10,000 free copies distributed in each, totaling 1,170,000 free copies distributed. To this day, I still meet people who have collections. But what motivated me the most was that the movements themselves would look at the publication and say: "Look, folks, there's more going on out there."

**Livia:** *In the second half of the 2000s, middle-class youth began attending cultural activities taking place in the outskirts. One key milestone in this trend was, arguably, the Sarau da Cooperifa. In your view, what explains this movement from the "center" to the "periphery," and how did these cultural expressions reach the local audience?*

The periphery has always been connected to the center. Hip hop is a centripetal movement – it came from the periphery to the center, developed strong connections there, and that was important, at least in the context of São Paulo, because the city's peripheral areas are very far from one another. I think *Cooperifa* is a unique example of a poetry event that attracted a lot of people from outside – not just from the middle class, but also from other peripheral neighborhoods. It was a novelty, and many people were inspired by it to start their own *saraus* in their communities. The *Sarau da Cooperifa* was born pop: even when it was still happening in Taboão, Marcelo Rubens Paiva wrote about it, and Eliane Brum also covered it for *Época* magazine, which drew a lot of outside attention. There's another factor: the *Bar do Zé Batidão*, where the event takes place, isn't in a favela. The surrounding area has houses with cars parked in the driveways – it's lower-middle-class. And I think that's the predominant class in the periphery. Also, it's easy to get there – there's a bus line right outside the bar that departs from Praça da Sé. It's a place you can reach without much hassle. It's not in Jardim Ângela, which is much farther out, or in Grajaú, which is even more remote. It's in Piraporinha, so that helped as well. And the event takes place in a bar, which gradually improved over time and gave it a hangout vibe. *Zé Batidão's* bar is well equipped, spacious, with good food, cold beer, it accepts all credit cards, has an accessible bathroom – very few *saraus* have that kind of infrastructure. So many factors contributed. There were excellent poets, the performances were strong, and the event was very strictly organized: only poetry could be recited. *Cooperifa* is a show in itself, and its legal name is "Cooperative of Artists from the Periphery." Sérgio is a very creative and intelligent person who had some successful strategies: he built alliances with the local amateur soccer teams, secured partnerships to produce their jerseys, and added the *Cooperifa* logo on the back. In return, the



team players were encouraged to attend the *sarau*. He also brought many schools and students.

I think the *sarau* format eventually lost momentum to *slam poetry*, which emerged in December 2008 with the *Slam do Núcleo Bartolomeu de Depoimentos*, followed by the *Slam da Vila Guilhermina*. Slam is a competition, so it generates more excitement. To win a slam, you have to present at least three original poems, and that pushed the level of quality higher – you have to be original, you have to perform, and you can’t use props, music, or anything else. It’s a very interesting format that stimulates creativity: you have three minutes to speak, and there’s a panel of judges scoring you, so it creates a fan base and cheering sections. Women gained space in the slam scene. Today, activism by Black women and the LGBTQ+ community dominates the scene.

Rap battles also gained momentum – they’ve always been part of hip hop, along with DJ battles, breakdance battles, and MC battles. The battle is a core element of hip-hop culture. But the battles we had back then weren’t as large as they are now. Today, for instance, the *Batalha da Matrix* in São Bernardo do Campo is massive – it draws almost 1,000 people, all from the periphery. These rhyme battles brought in a much bigger audience. In a battle, you have to “take down” your opponent, and people want to win prize money. Roberta Estrela D’Alva, when she started *Slam ZAP (Zona Autônoma da Palavra)*, used to award books to the winners, but that only lasted for a while – eventually, the battles shifted to cash prizes. And when there’s money involved, many more people sign up. So it’s a different scene: there’s no role for the State, no public policy – this is something emerging in its own way. We even considered organizing a gathering of all the rhyme battles happening across São Paulo, as a way to host and reflect on that scene.

But one thing I always hoped for was that people from outside would come to the periphery. For about ten years, I had to justify in every project proposal: why focus on the periphery? The goal was never to segregate, but rather to integrate – to help reduce this apartheid and foster flows from the center to the periphery, and from the periphery to the center. That’s the strength of funk – it moves from the periphery to the periphery. Just to give an example, even if it’s a tragic one: during that massacre in Paraisópolis five years ago, nine young people were killed – and they were all from outside the community. The police cornered everyone, and Paraisópolis is full of alleyways. The locals knew where to run, but the ones who died were from outside. They were there because it was a *baile funk*<sup>2</sup> night. Funk creates a lot of tension in the community – it’s not a calm event, and I don’t think it ever will be. It’s a street party, it’s loud, and it attracts huge crowds.

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<sup>2</sup> The “baile funk” is a social event where funk music from Rio is played, usually in an informal and vibrant atmosphere.

Quem atrai também bastante gente de fora são as rodas de samba, ainda mais o Samba da Vela que é em Santo Amaro, na Casa de Cultura, que é na avenida onde passa ônibus para todo lado, então o Samba da Vela atraiu muito público.

**Livia:** *One of the questions we asked ourselves back then – when Kalil was the Secretary of Culture in the City of São Paulo and both the VAI program and the “Estéticas das Periferias” festival saw a significant increase in funding – was whether that visibility and legitimation were a conquest or a concession. In your view, what made this moment possible, considering that cultural expressions have always had a strong presence in peripheral territories? Which institutions contributed the most to this process – the public sector, private institutions, NGOs, or the media?*

I strongly argue that hip hop was the main driver, particularly in the 1990s. Then came public policies, which helped to actually structure a peripheral circuit and support artists in developing professionally and becoming viable as groups. People would win one grant, then another, start networking, and gradually form a collective. Many artists could also work as workshop facilitators, which I think is a great professional path for them. Here at *Ação Educativa*, through the *Arte na Casa* project – a partnership with *Fundação Casa* – we hired many artists over a span of twelve years. More than 100 art educators worked with us. So these groups develop their artistic and cultural projects, and at the same time, people gain employment. Some groups don’t endure, but today there are countless examples of collectives that were boosted by the VAI program (Cultural Initiatives Support Program) and are now well-established – they have a corporate registration, or they became production companies or NGOs.

There’s a broad supply of opportunities, even though it’s still far below the actual demand, but social project funding is out there. Public calls for proposals and funding programs have their limitations and problems, but they do help. I think the grant system helps break away from clientelist logic, since it at least involves a selection process. And in São Paulo, funding options have increased significantly: there’s VAI, VAI 2, the Law for Peripheral Cultural Promotion, and the *ProAC* calls – State-level cultural funding, which has had a creative economy component for quite some time now. In the last three or four years after the pandemic, there’s also been a major influx of funding via parliamentary amendments. These already existed before, but they’ve grown significantly. And a single amendment typically means at least R\$100,000 to R\$200,000.

The Peripheral Cultural Promotion program is very important – you can receive up to R\$400,000 in funding for two years. Several groups consolidated through this support and were able to establish physical headquarters. This deserves



to be studied: the program started in 2016 and is nearing its tenth year, and although not many groups access it, the available funding is substantial.

O SESC também, ajudou muito a expandir, porque houve uma decisão institucional de acolher mais essa produção cultural periférica. E as instituições privadas que são fortes na cultura, como o Instituto Moreira Salles, o Itaú Cultural, a Fundação Tilde Setubal deram espaço, valorizaram e hoje buscam sempre mais curadorias de pessoas negras, periféricas. No SESC, você já vê pessoas em postos de alto escalão, em gerência de unidade.

SESC also played a major role in expanding this space because of an institutional decision to embrace peripheral cultural production. And private cultural institutions – such as Instituto Moreira Salles, Itaú Cultural, and *Fundação Tide Setubal* – gave visibility and value to this field and now actively seek curators from Black and peripheral communities. At SESC, you can already see people from those backgrounds occupying high-level management positions. We also participated in two calls for proposals from the *Pontos de Cultura* program, which was another very important initiative to strengthen the peripheral cultural scene. There are more than 100 *Cultural Points* in the city of São Paulo, around 1,000 in the state, and over 5,000 throughout the country. Additionally, we became a *Pontão de Cultura* with a project aimed at discussing a question posed to us by Professor José Guilherme Magnani, with whom we’ve always had a strong dialogue: what exactly is the culture produced in the peripheries? Does it have its own aesthetic originality? Even though we won the grant in 2010, we didn’t receive the funding – but the idea remained. I had learned about the exhibition *Estética da Periferia*, organized by Professor Heloísa Buarque de Hollanda and curator Gringo Cardia in Rio de Janeiro and Recife. So I reached out to Heloísa – she was an important mentor and inspiration – and she said, “Should we try to do the event anyway?” So I began seeking support and found the Spanish Cultural Center, whose director at the time was Ana Thomé. I met her through JAMAC (*Jardim Miriam Arte Clube*) in Jardim Miriam. She had institutional contacts at SESC and Itaú, and I already had ties with the office of Secretary of Culture Alexandre Kalil, who was also interested in the periphery. Helena Abramo was working there as an advisor. At that time, the country was booming – during the Lula administration – and there were plenty of opportunities. So we all sat around a table at the Spanish Cultural Center and decided to organize the seminar.

The initial idea was to hold a series of seminars and a cultural showcase, with participation from academics and cultural programmers, in addition to cultural collectives. But the collectives felt alienated – they didn’t feel like they were part of it. And in fact, they hadn’t been involved in the planning. So, the following year, we brought them into the organizing process, and the name changed to *Estéticas das Periferias* – in the plural. The event then followed a deeply participatory path,

to the point that today there are 50 collectives involved in the curatorship. Decisions are made collectively, including the choice of theme. There is now a grand opening performance each year, held in the city center to ensure accessibility. After that, we distribute funds equally to each group so they can create local programming based on jointly defined themes. The event has become so decentralized that sometimes it risks being diluted – São Paulo is a huge city. So we began encouraging the groups to organize in regional clusters, always seeking to renew the participating collectives each year.

We also had the *Periferia no Centro* cultural space here, which for five years hosted a wide range of programming – excellent showcases always curated by people from the periphery. Funk also became part of that space through the *Liga do Funk*.

Another key figure was Erica Peçanha, whose book – based on her master's thesis at USP – analyzed peripheral writers and had a major impact in helping people understand this poetic movement.

One more factor that contributed since 2010 is that many people from the periphery entered universities and graduate programs that became more accessible, such as the Cultural Studies and Social Change programs at EACH/USP. That was also a result of public policy. So today there are many intellectuals from the periphery – PhDs and Master's graduates – and we already have academic production coming directly from residents of the periphery. Allan da Rosa is one of them; he earned his PhD at the School of Education at USP. I now make a point of highlighting the work of these academics from the periphery, and the role and sensitivity that research centers and faculty are showing in welcoming this kind of scholarship – which doesn't rely on the old notion of objective distance. On the contrary, in many cases, the researcher is also the subject of the research.

**Livia:** *In the article I published in 2013, which owes a great deal to our conversations, I argued for the need to go beyond a univocal reading of the place that peripheral artistic and cultural expressions had achieved. These accomplishments could be interpreted in different ways: as a new form of political action and organization (and that's the most widespread view in academia – the notion of a “peripheral cultural movement”; one researcher even compared cultural collectives to base ecclesial communities, as if collectives today represented what the CEBs did in the 1970s and 1980s in terms of promoting political organization in the peripheries), particularly in terms of a certain positive redefinition of subjects and territories usually stigmatized as problematic and violent. They could also be interpreted as the result of appropriation by the cultural market, always seeking new products, with the “novelty” represented by “peripheral cultures” (“any product can be saturated with identity,” says Paul Gilroy); or as instruments of control and “domestication”*

*of peripheral youth, making “art and culture” an “antidote” to involvement in drug trafficking or other “risky behaviors” (“Culture as antidote in war zones” was even the title of an important project by CUFA, AfroReggae, and Itaú Cultural). In that sense, art and culture replaced labor in occupying young people’s supposedly “idle” time, and artists became “social” workers. Do you agree with this interpretation? Do you think it still holds up, or has the pendulum swung more toward one of the three readings?*

I think all three interpretations are valid. In the social field, culture ends up being convenient – as George Yúdice says – because it helps mobilize forces, and sell an image of the periphery which, even if not transformative, provides a sense of citizenship. Culture promotes inclusion. But many social organizations that work with culture are also businesses; they market the periphery as a niche. CUFA, for instance, which created *Expo Favela*, and *Gerando Falcões* are examples. That said, distinctions exist between organizations, and in some of them today, most of the staff are from the periphery. So, I do believe those three dimensions coexist, but I think the pendulum has swung more toward the market and political sides. I’ve always thought that, as a social movement, culture is a paradox: the cultural scene is strong, but there’s never been a movement of equal strength – not even hip hop managed to organize itself in a way that matched its expressive power. There was a movement that formed around the Peripheral Cultural Promotion Law, which was another achievement during a Workers’ Party administration in city hall. Still, I recently saw an exhibition funded by that program that didn’t get proper recognition – because there’s always that strong sense of “for us, by us.” That cultural movement that emerged from the peripheries, which pressured the city council and won the law, later lost momentum. They even reached out to us recently – now that we’re part of the Culture Committee – to help reorganize the peripheral cultural movement. But there has never been a solid movement or a cohesive network of *saraus*, for example. We’re currently supporting a network of peripheral publishers – it’s been four years now – mainly in an effort to make them commercially viable. Some publishers don’t see themselves as businesses, but they all need to sell books in order to publish works that wouldn’t otherwise find a place in the traditional market.

**Livia:** *When it comes to the arts, would you say the circulation and visibility of peripheral artistic production led to a change in the artistic taste of São Paulo’s middle class? What is the aesthetic significance of this output? Was the emphasis on identity more prominent than the emphasis on aesthetics? Or were the artists able to escape the label of “peripheral artists” who can only speak about their conditions?*

I believe that today, there is a kind of recognition that is no longer based on exoticism; I think the periphery has firmly established itself. In the last mayoral election campaign in São Paulo, for instance, all the candidates talked extensively about the periphery. So, being from the periphery no longer diminishes an artist – on the contrary, it adds value. I believe that peripheral cultural production is not about competing with the canon or the elite. But an artist like Anitta is out there, performing at Copacabana's New Year's Eve celebration – she's been an established artist for many years, a girl who came from the suburbs. And she doesn't go around saying "I'm from the periphery," but she values her origins and uses a peripheral language. Funk, even though the middle class might embrace it, is a culture of the periphery – and there's now a growing appreciation for peripheral aesthetics in terms of artistic production. So, being from the periphery is seen as a strength. That's a major shift. Here at *Ação Educativa*, we were once targeted when we produced a textbook that included expressions like "*nós pega o peixe*" in a dialogue. In the dialogue, a student asks whether it's right or wrong, and the teacher responds that there's no right or wrong – it's simply your way of speaking. But you might face linguistic prejudice.

I also think there's currently a strong push for experimentation. Literature has become firmly established – there are many peripheral authors, and publishers are now actively seeking them out, especially Black and peripheral writers. There's a distinct body of work with specific characteristics that we can call peripheral literature, and it has even led to the creation of dedicated publishing houses. In theater, too, there are now well-established groups like Companhia Brava, Grupo Clariô, and Pombas Urbanas, which developed their own street theater aesthetic. I recently attended a festival they organized – I'm still a big supporter of peripheral productions because I genuinely enjoy them and see a lot of quality work. In cinema, too – take Daniel Fagundes, for example – he curated a retrospective of 20 years of filmmaking, and his films already reflect a conceptual depth that goes beyond peripheral affirmation. That affirmation was essential at the beginning, as it was something real that had long been invisible.

Dance is another artistic language gaining strength. Peripheral artists who have managed to organize themselves more effectively have started accessing funding for theater and dance as well. It's a substantial amount of funding – you can support yourself for two years, focus solely on that, do research, develop a show, and take it on tour.

I have no interest in preaching that someone "sold out to the system." People become artists – even if not everyone does, because the art market is small and can't accommodate everyone – but there is much more space now. And today, the periphery is valued. I no longer see that discrediting. You're recognized because you're from the periphery, and because your work is sophisticated, it has substance.

**Livia:** *Related to the previous question, how have artistic and cultural institutions responded to this? The impression is that these demands are absorbed at the margins, without structurally affecting the organization or the circuits of legitimation – they’re “special” exhibitions, “guest” curators, but neither the works nor the artists are incorporated into permanent collections or staff structures.*

I think that’s starting to change. For example, the Instituto Moreira Salles held an exhibition on Carolina Maria de Jesus curated by Helio Menezes. So I think it’s beginning to gain importance. One of the IMS directors is Renata Bittencourt, a Black woman we’ve known for a long time. She’s not exactly on the left, but she’s part of the progressive field.

The *Fábricas de Cultura*, which are extremely important spaces in the periphery (there are twelve, but there could be many more), are quite open. All the managers are people from the neighborhoods – they’re not people from Pinheiros. That’s no longer sustainable. The community itself, the artists, push back. These cultural facilities in the periphery are mostly managed by locals, and the programming is also predominantly peripheral. I can’t say the same for the city-run Casas de Cultura, which currently aren’t necessarily managed by people from the periphery. They face serious hiring difficulties and precarious working conditions. The *Centro Cultural da Juventude* is also unfortunately lacking funding at the moment.

I think IMS spaces are not likely to become peripheral spaces – they were created by the elite. Even so, they’ve been opening up valuable spaces that are likely to grow. Also, when a group performs in such a venue, it helps them develop, since it demands a solid presentation, good direction. I went to see Sarau do Binho at Itaú Cultural. I believe they asked Naruna Costa, from Espaço Clariô, to direct it – it turned out beautifully. I also saw a performance by two slam poets, Mel Duarte and Luz Ribeiro, also directed by Naruna Costa, and it was excellent. Two years ago, there was an incredible graffiti exhibition at Itaú Cultural that was so successful they had to extend it. We organized an exhibition called “*INTERSECÇÕES – Negros(as), indígenas e periféricos(as) na cidade de São Paulo*,” which was my first experience as a curator, together with Adriana Barbosa and Nabor Jr., at the Museu da Cidade (Solar da Marquesa and Casa da Imagem), located at Pátio do Colégio. That’s where the Museum of Favelas recently relocated, reopening with an exhibition about Racionais MCs. The Museum of Indigenous Cultures will also move into the same area, occupying amazing buildings.

I think we’re gaining space, even if I can’t precisely measure it. All of this doesn’t shake the structures of power, but we are expanding our audience. The opportunity to take part in these spaces helps groups grow both aesthetically and artistically. Independent publishers often report that one of their authors later began publishing with major houses like Companhia das Letras. I created the *Peripheral*

*Literature Collection* at Editora Global in 2007 and ran it until 2012. Sérgio Vaz stood out as an author and is now somewhat of a curator there; he brought in Elisandra, who used to be the editor of the *Agenda Cultural das Periferias*. She told me she finds it interesting and is getting a real sense of what it means to be in the market. It's a contest, but people are occupying spaces, and I believe that's a growing trend. Many people are establishing themselves as artists, curators.

**Livia:** *One important issue, in my view, is that the availability of public funding calls (public notices) made it possible for young people from the peripheries – usually destined to enter the labor market as cheap labor – to bet on making a living through “art and culture.” A bet filled with contradictions. Can you talk about that?*

Living off art isn't easy – not even for middle-class artists. It's always a challenge. Today, peripheral artists also give lectures and work as art educators. But yes, it's a constant struggle. Writers often manage to have formal jobs, for example as teachers, while developing their literary work.

**Livia:** *How do you see the future of these movements in the current context of far-right growth and democratic crisis?*

I think we're in a more mature phase. At the same time, there are many young people entering the scene. Back in the 2000s, we experienced a period of legitimization, and I think we've already moved past that. São Paulo benefits from having many public policies. Now, with the Aldir Blanc Law, cultural administrators are required to allocate 20% of the funding to the Cultura Viva Program, which supports Culture Points. So collectives will need to become more organized.

Of course, there are enormous challenges. For example, how will these people retire? I've been talking to graffiti artists for twenty years – they're getting older, but they've never contributed to social security. So how will they retire? By age, through the BPC, receiving only the minimum wage? This is a battle that must be faced. The Ministry of Culture has now created a department focused on this – the labor side of cultural work. I saw it as a positive signal from the Ministry. I think the pandemic exposed this reality – it revealed the precarious conditions and showed how even well-established artists were struggling. Now, imagine those from the periphery.

And it's not just the artists. Think about the workers – those in film, in theater, all the people who work in these festivals. It's a huge number, with many working under precarious conditions. During the pandemic, several cultural groups organized food drives in their neighborhoods. I was invited to join the city's committee responsible for basic food basket distribution policies, and the first action was precisely with cultural groups from the periphery. During the emergency phase, the Aldir



Blanc Law provided significant support for these workers. And now, my focus is very much on the distribution of funds. The Culture Committee is a great initiative because we transfer R\$170,000 to each of our partner institutions, which in our case are: the Association for the Preservation of Afro-Brazilian Culture of Araraquara (APRECABA); Uni Jovem, an NGO focused more on social assistance, based in Marília; and the Caiçara Museum, in Ubatuba. Each of these organizations operates within its own territory, covering several municipalities. We’re currently active in the Baixada Santista, some municipalities in Greater São Paulo, as well as in the capital. I think it’s a strong initiative, even if I don’t know how long it will last – we’ve managed to expand our areas of operation. I believe this program should be renewed for another two years. But it’s difficult to imagine a program like this outside a democratic government. It’s a bold undertaking – an effort to bring cultural policies into local territories, while also creating articulation with the existing municipal cultural policies. Moreover, the federal government is distributing funds directly to municipalities. Any municipality, no matter how small, is now drafting an annual plan for resource allocation. But the issue is management capacity. I saw a statistic: only 28% of Aldir Blanc funds have actually been used.

Still, it’s a beginning. The idea is to create a kind of SUS (Unified Health System) for culture. That’s essentially the goal – we’re also trying to support the technical staff of local departments, offering training and helping them understand how to design a public call. Imagine how many municipalities, especially in the interior, have never done one. We even held an event in Presidente Prudente. We end up acting as an extension of the Ministry of Culture, but we don’t want to just respond to demands. Even though we’re pleased with this diversity and with the possibility of reaching beyond the major city periphery. The Caiçara Museum represents traditional culture, in Marília it’s youth culture, and in Araraquara it’s Black culture – each with its own profile.

**Livia:** *And what about the conflicts?*

Well, there are many conflicts in the relationship with the State – the main source of tension is always with the State. Even now, under the federal government, a lot of people are complaining. This administration came in eager to do everything, to make up for lost time, and launched a bunch of public calls for proposals, but now it can’t make the payments. And I think that’s a mistake – the federal government shouldn’t be issuing calls or managing projects. Those are missteps. It should transfer funding to states and municipalities, since they are the ones responsible for implementing policies.

Here in São Paulo, the state-level department eliminated the cultural workshops, which were important spaces for experimentation and study. They launched a

program to train workers for the cultural industry, specifically for projects approved under ProAC. But to access it, you need a legal entity (CNPJ) that's at least five years old, so it excludes a lot of people. Imagine how many complaints. The movement often emerges as a response to these types of conflicts, but there isn't much of a proactive movement, one that anticipates issues.

There are also conflicts within the peripheries themselves – with the community. Funk, for example, brings a lot of conflict. The expansion of evangelical churches and this idea of depoliticized entrepreneurship – neoliberal entrepreneurship – has taken hold, especially in the funk scene and in the lower-middle-class areas of the periphery. I often stress this: there's a strong lower-middle class in the peripheries. On the other hand, I'm also seeing a movement to reclaim hip hop “posses” (crews), as a reaction against the spread of neoliberal ideas. So there are important political disputes, and the periphery is not homogeneous – it's highly diverse.

**Livia:** *Can we say that “the periphery is no longer the periphery anywhere”?*

Exactly! I think that phrase might have made sense back in the 1990s. It's a line by GOG, which Racionais MC's sampled. Yes, the periphery has changed a lot. Think about Paraisópolis or Heliópolis – there's now basic sanitation, a thriving commercial sector. The right even got a lot of votes in Heliópolis.

But I think it's diverse – you can't apply a single label. Over the years, there's been considerable support for artists – always insufficient, of course. The periphery still has very few cultural facilities. The CEUs (Unified Education Centers) were important, but many of those spaces are now deteriorated.

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